DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 091 873 EA 006 260

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TITLE Differentiated Staffing: A Brief Statement.
INSTITUTION Pittsburgh Univ., Pa. Office of Research and Field Services.
PUB DATE Feb 71
NOTE 5p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Guides; *Differentiated Staffs; *Paraprofessional School Personnel; Speeches; Staff Role; *Staff Utilization; *Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Participation; *Teachers

ABSTRACT

This paper defines differentiated staffing, suggests how it might be implemented, and describes the composition and role of the planning board, the professional staff, and the paraprofessional staff. This proposed staffing system relies heavily on the willingness of teachers to assume responsibility for regulating their own profession, with teachers being primarily responsible for evaluating the staff. (JF)

ED 091873

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A BRIEF STATEMENT

OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND FIELD SERVICES

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

February 1, 1971

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EA 006 260

Differentiated Staffing is

- what results when professionals in education question the rationale underlying current practices, take a fresh look at their profession, and plan together a new, more equitable and efficient system of employing and deploying staff.

- what happens when a profession has the courage to accept the responsibility demanded of professionals, to determine for its own members their standards, regulations, and conditions of employment, assignment, evaluation, and promotion.

- the product of the cooperative attempts of teachers and administrators to alleviate the shortcomings and build upon the strengths of traditional concepts of staffing.

- the redistribution of the duties and responsibilities of teachers to free them from the non-professional tasks that inhibit full utilization of their educational talents.

- a revision of the concept that a teacher's salary is necessarily "locked in" to a schedule that rewards time served, but ignores ability and responsibility. This revision improves the teaching profession's holding power by making top salaries for top people a reality.

Implementation

The success of the idea of Differentiated Staffing will depend, to a large extent, upon the skill with which it is implemented. We would suggest that very early the idea be brought to those who will be affected by the new staffing pattern, so that the implementation will result in joint decisions and action.

The suggestion implies a willingness to risk being turned down or having the idea of Differentiated Staffing turned into something different from that originally conceived in one's own model. But such risks are run anyway, implicitly, if those affected do not buy the idea or pervert it in the implementation. In that case one has a staff or community that is alienated, in addition to an imperfect project.

In order to carry out the idea of democratic decision-making, the Planning Board is suggested as one, but certainly not the only, approach.

The Planning Board

The school district looks to the Planning Board to provide direction for Differentiated Staffing. Teachers, administrators, school board members, parents and students comprise the population

from which Planning Board members are selected. The selection process can be handled in any fashion that is equitable and produces an intelligent, interested Board. To such a deliberative body, the chief school administrator must present, in broad terms. his hopes for its realization.

Democratic processes must characterize the deliberations of the Planning Board, and the final product of such deliberations must reflect the best thinking of the total group.

The rationale for including parents and students in the planning stage is two fold: First, their support is necessary to develop and implement the Board's recommendations; and second, their presence at planning sessions promotes an open climate and tends to inhibit considerations of self-interest that characterize the distributive bargaining atmosphere.

In establishing the model for Differentiated Staffing, the Planning Board will note what other school districts have done with the concept and move from there to develop their own model.

After such a model is developed, the Planning Board is not phased out, but assumes new responsibilities to establish performance criteria, evaluate outcomes, and revise the model where revision is suggested.

Under the Differentiated Staffing principle, employment in the school district is stratified into various professional and paraprofessional levels, each with its own job description, educational requirements, and salary. Below are samples of levels that Planning Boards may devise:

Professional Staff

Master Teacher - This exceptionally able person provides services to the staff of the subject area he heads. Typically, he is an experienced professional, with advanced degrees and demonstrated scholarship, teaching and leadership ability whose salary may equal or exceed that of the superintendent. The Master Teacher spends a good deal of time in the classroom, but his primary function is the improvement of instruction. He knows and conducts research, designs new methods, and develops pilot programs with the help of the Senior Teachers. The Master Teacher is often on joint appointment with the local university, and operates, in effect, in several different professional worlds with equal competence. Decision-making authority is exercised by the Master Teacher and Senior Teachers whose positions are untenured, full-time positions. They may be evaluated and reappointed yearly by the staff.

Senior Teacher - This experienced professional usually holds advanced degrees and is experienced in training teachers.

Most of his time is spent in the classroom, however. When the Master Teacher and Senior Teacher have developed new methods and tested them, the Senior Teacher conducts in-service workshops, training all the teachers in his field in the new technique. Salary of the Senior Teacher is better than twice that of a beginning teacher. This is a full-time position.

Tenured Staff - The majority of the professional staff is in this category. Their salaries are competitive with those paid in comparable districts from both minimum and maximum standpoints. All of their time is devoted to teaching since the less skilled duties of supervising study and other activities are performed in other ways. In this category fall many of those who want to spend a minimum of time in the profession and in the school during the "school year" only.

Associate Teachers - In this category are probationary and student teachers who have the least experience and the most supervision by experienced teachers. The salaries of probationary teachers in selected districts range below the tenured teacher. Associate Teachers have the lightest teaching loads and the greatest support in developing their professional skills. Teacher interns, new professionals, Peace Corps and Teacher Corps Trainees and other non-certified staff are in this category.

Paraprofessional Staff

Teacher Aides - This position is perhaps the most varied. In some districts it will be a step in a teaching career ladder. In others, it will be a permanent support position devoted to non-teaching chores under direction of teachers. In many districts, aides will have roles somewhere between the two extremes. Status of aides will vary from the unemployed and undereducated poor to upper middle class college-educated housewives who embrace the work to flee boredom at home.

Resource Center Attendant - This service position is required by the rapid development of instructional materials centers in schools. Attendants are responsible for the maintenance, care and distribution of materials used by teachers, including library materials, audio-visual aids, physical education equipment, etc. They may be called upon to operate such equipment for teachers and to assist in duplicating materials, distributing text books and supplies, etc.

Lab Assistant - As the title implies, this person assists teachers of laboratory subjects in making arrangements for, carrying out, and cleaning up after lab experiments. They are responsible for the care and maintenance of equipment and for such other duties as supervising teachers may devise.

It is apparent that paraprofessionals perform tasks for which they must be trained. Providing for this training is an additional responsibility of staff.

The Principal and Differentiated Staffing

Some systems report that Differentiated Staffing might well carry over to the administrative departments of a school. Appointing an assistant principal to the job of business manager frees the principal from the paper work that keeps him from functioning as educational leader. Under this system the principal, who should be an expert in human relations, can exercise his talents as a change agent, bringing out the best that is in the faculty, and the students, and establishing good relations with the public and parents.

Evaluation

This proposed staffing system relies heavily upon the willingness of teachers to assume responsibility for regulating their own profession. As suggested above, teachers are to be primarily responsible for evaluating staff.

This implies that teachers will have an important voice in recruiting, interviewing, evaluating, promoting and separating staff within the district.

Administrators, then, will be required to share their authority in these areas and to assist teachers in developing criteria to act in these new situations.

The concept of Differentiated Staffing outlined above cannot be considered in isolation. Implicit in the concept is the reconsideration of many of the factors we accept today without thinking. Certainly the scheduling of students and the deployment of staff must be re-examined, as must our concepts of curriculum, organizational structure, and the roles of staff. The very definitions of school, teacher, and student, perhaps, are undergoing change and require nothing less than our best reflective thinking.